UNITED NATIONS **A**

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/53/57
13 January 1998

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Fifty-third session

PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

Letter dated 19 December 1997 from the Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In October 1997, the Government of Norway, in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund and the International Labour Organization, organized an international conference on child labour. The conference, which took place in Oslo, was attended by representatives of Governments and non-governmental organizations from a large number of countries.

In view of the increasing worldwide awareness of and preoccupation with the problems related to child labour, I would kindly request that the Agenda for Action adopted at the conference be published as an official document of the United Nations.

The Agenda for Action is of direct relevance to the consideration of the item entitled "Promotion and protection of the rights of the child".

Your assistance in this regard will be highly appreciated.

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OSLO CONFERENCE ON CHILD LABOUR

AGENDA FOR ACTION

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1. Context

1.1 The Oslo Conference on Child Labour reflected the growing international concern about child labour. The conference was based on broadly accepted international instruments, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the ILO Minimum Age Convention (No. 138, 1973) and the Forced Labour Convention (No. 29, 1930), and on a framework consisting of the Plan of Action from the World Summit for Children (1990) and the Jomtien Declaration on Education for All (1990). The conference was a close follow-up to the Amsterdam Child Labour Conference (1997).

1.2 The participants at the Oslo conference recognised the importance of the many international and regional meetings having a bearing on the issue of child labour. Particular reference was made to the following:

- Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action from the World Conference on Human Rights (1993),
- Programme for Action from the Cairo Conference on Population and Development (1994),
- Declaration and Programme for Action from the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development (1995),
- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action from the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995),
- Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action of the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (1996),
- Chair's Summary and Conclusions from the Amsterdam Child Labour Conference (1997),

- Declaration of the Ninth SAARC Summit in Malé (May 1997),
- Cartagena Declaration on the Elimination of Child Labour (May 1997),
- Recommendations of the OAU Summit in Harare (June 1997).

1.3 Investment in the physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development of children is an ethical, social, and economic imperative for all societies. The Convention on the Rights of the Child constitutes the legal framework for the promotion and protection of the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of all children in an integrated manner. This means that all children, without exception, must be ensured survival, personal and social development, and physical, psychological and moral integrity, and that special protection measures must be taken for those in especially difficult circumstances.

1.4 Child labour is both a consequence and a cause of poverty. Thus, strategies for poverty reduction and elimination need to address this problem. Use of child labour slows down economic growth and social development and it constitutes a severe violation of basic human rights. The interconnection between child labour and the social conditions of the child and his/her family should be at the centre of sustainable

social development policies. The 20/20 initiative, which invites interested developed and developing countries to allocate, on average, 20 per cent of official development assistance (ODA) and national budget, respectively, to basic social programmes including basic education and primary health care, can effectively contribute to the fight against child labour. There is evidence that investment in human capital from early childhood, e.g. education and health, provides a society with a greater potential for economic and social development.

1.5 Child workers, especially girls, are at high risk, because child labour jeopardises the child's health, safety and education and physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. Girls are particularly vulnerable to the dangers of child labour and require special attention.

1.6 Effective action against child labour requires political commitment and the creation of a broad coalition that includes both government and all sectors of society and adequate resources. The obligation to develop and implement policies, legislation, strategies and measures for the elimination of child labour rests with governments. Good governance can maximise the potential for equitable and sustainable economic growth as a strategy to counter child labour. Preventive measures should be recognised as the most cost-effective means of eliminating child labour.

1.7 Education, particularly basic education, is one of the principal means of preventing and eliminating child labour. [1] Children outside the school system are vulnerable to various forms of exploitation, particularly to economic exploitation such as child labour. Child workers or potential child workers and the flow of children into work can be stemmed by establishing a system of accessible, relevant, high-quality, universal, compulsory basic education that is free for all.

1.8 Cooperation at the international level may contribute to the setting of standards, to overall poverty reduction, to better assessment of the impact of measures against child labour on the children and their families and in the framework of regional and international cooperation, and to promoting commitments with the aim of eliminating child labour.

1.9 Developed countries will strive for the fulfilment of the agreed United Nations target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product (GNP) for overall ODA as soon as possible, and to a more effective use of existing resources in close cooperation with developing countries.

[1] The term basic education refers to the years of free compulsory education.

2. Goal and priorities

2.1 The **main goal** is the effective elimination of child labour.

2.2 The objective is to protect the child from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

2.3 **Priority** should be given to the immediate removal of children from the most intolerable (extreme) forms of child labour and to the physical and psychological rehabilitation of children involved. In line with such measures, adequate alternatives have to be provided for these children and their families.

2.4 Countries should **progressively move towards** the elimination of all child labour for children of school age (age depending on legislation in each country), to include any activity that interferes with children's development and their education.

2.5 The participants at the Oslo Conference agreed on the urgency of addressing the issues of child labour as discussed at the conference, and in particular of giving priority to the actions at national and international levels listed below.

3. Action at national level

Policy and programme development

3.1 Ensure that social and **economic policies** aimed at combating poverty focus on the needs of families and the community in their productive and caring activities, especially by implementing measures to provide the families of child workers with sustainable employment and income opportunities.

3.2 Design or accelerate implementation of existing **National Plans of Action for the Child**, as defined in the final document from the World Summit for Children, including strategies which integrate at long, medium and short term, social, political and economic measures for the elimination of child labour, and ensure the necessary resource allocation for their sustainable implementation.

3.3 Improve national systems for **collection of gender disaggregated information,** starting with **birth, civil and death registration** and comprising the scale, distribution and characteristics of child labour and related socio-economic data, including work carried out by very young children and work within the informal sector, inter alia through national censuses and household surveys, and develop the collection of statistical documentation on the progress made in accordance with appropriate indicators.

3.4 Draw up and implement a **time-bound programme of action** to prevent and eliminate all forms of child labour, starting with the most intolerable (extreme) forms. This should include adequate measures for the reintegration of children removed from work.

3.5 View the child in its **social conte..t**, including his/her family and general situation, and ensure that the voices of civil society, including those of the children themselves, their families and the local community, are heard in an appropriate and meaningful way when policies are developed and actions against child labour are decided.

3.6 Establish cross-sectoral and integrated **institutional mechanisms** for the progressive elimination of child labour, such as a high-level body, comprising all relevant ministries, and special committees for coordinating the activities of the various actors combating child labour, and define their complementary roles. These mechanisms should also involve local authorities, workers' and employers' organisations, NGOs and other relevant organisations. They should be administered at governmental level and avoid duplication of the work being done by other bodies.

3.7 Establish **multisectoral rehabilitation programmes** for children withdrawn from work, with a view to reintegrating the children into the family, the community and the formal education system.

Social mobilisation and role of civil society

3.8 Promote **changes in social perception** and **increased social awareness,** especially at the local level, by informing, educating, and sensitising parents and children, teachers, communities and society in general, with regard to the rights of the child, especially the right to basic education and to protection from economic exploitation.

3.9 Identify all groups concerned with and affected by child labour and define the **different strategies** necessary for awareness-raising within each group, recognising the need for involving all parties and establishing systems for assessing the impact of the various strategies.

3.10 Promote the **empowerment of women,** starting with the girl child, and ensure their full and equal participation in all aspects of society, including decision-making and participation in education and economic development on all levels. Education and improvement of women and girl's economic situation will have a positive impact on the well-being of children in general, and contribute to the elimination of child labour.

3.11 Support the **tripartite cooperation** between government and workers' and employers' organisations in their efforts to reduce incentives for using child labour, and in the implementation of labour legislation in all areas of work, including agriculture, domestic work and small businesses.

3.12 Encourage **action by trade unions** against child labour, in particular by supporting such action as a core issue for their policies, programmes and regular activities, and recognise and support the role of the unions in combating child labour, among others by involving them in the drafting of national plans and policies and in their implementation at all levels, and by encouraging them to promote awareness-raising among their members and the public.

3.13 Raise the awareness of **employers' organisations, including the corporate sector,** and involve them in the fight against child labour. Measures aimed at eliminating the demand for child labour could include identification of where in the chain of production child labour occurs, and support the development of voluntary codes of conduct on child labour combined with financial and material investment in programmes and projects to assist children and their families.

3.14 Stimulate **private sector investment** in ways that may contribute to the elimination of child labour, especially where and when rapidly growing investment may provide opportunities for new technologies and for replacing child workers by adults.

3.15 Encourage and support the **replacement of child workers** by unemployed adults, preferably from the same extended family wherever possible, and support initiatives to improve economic conditions for poor households. Any economic incentives given to parents of children withdrawn from work should be part of larger income-generating programmes.

3.16 Support the **non-governmental sector** in its efforts to complement and stimulate government action against child labour and to identify and denounce child labour abuses, encourage its further involvement and innovation to include children's participation in child labour action, support its efforts to carry out specific research on child labour and improve information networks and to promote intervention programmes in sectors of risk.

3.17 Support and encourage journalists and other media professionals who may contribute to social mobilisation by providing information of the highest quality, reliability and ethical standards concerning all aspects of child labour.

Education

3.18 Every child has the right to education. All work which interferes with the child's education must be regarded as unacceptable.

3.19 Formulate and implement a **time-bound programme for universal compulsory** basic **education free for all** that will ensure the necessary quality and relevance, as a central component of the national plan of action. This programme should encompass comprehensive policies indicating the current percentage of GNP allotted to basic

education, a target percentage for future allocations, and plans for improvement of education in terms of scope, quality and relevance. Laws and regulations to ensure that all children have access to education are required.

3.20 Advance the goal of **equal access to education** by taking measures to eliminate discrimination in education at all levels on the basis of gender, race, religion, national origin, age or disability.

3.21 Create a **gender-sensitive educational system** in order to ensure equal education and training opportunities and full and equal participation of women in educational administration and policy- and decision-making.

3.22 Ensure access to and completion of **relevant high-quality compulsory** basic **education free for all** children, paying special attention to girls to ensure their full and equal access to and possibility of completing such education. Develop job training programmes within the general framework of public education, and make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children.

3.23 Create **vocational training opportunities and apprenticeship programmes** for both boys and girls above school age, which focus on education and training, to be monitored by the competent authorities as a deterrent to exploitative practices, and strengthen such programmes where they already exist.

3.24 **Integrate working children**, wherever possible, into the formal education system. Non-formal education, such as part-time schools and open schools, is a useful transitional measure for reaching working children and children without access to formal education, as are special programmes that give working children access to education.

Legislation

3.25 Adopt and implement **national legislation** and policies on child labour in conformity with international standards and harmonise child labour legislation and policies with legislation and policies governing basic education, including protection of children in the informal sector, taking into consideration gender-specific needs and the effects of ethnic, religious and other forms of discrimination on the incidence of child labour. National legislation should make provision for inspection.

3.26 Promote **awareness-raising** and **dissemination of information in an easily understandable form** on local, national and international legislation concerning child labour among adults and working and non-working children alike.

3.27 Strengthen and improve the judiciary and the legal enforcement processes by sensitising and training such personnel as prosecutors and judges, police and correction officers in child labour-related legislation.

3.28 Strengthen and improve the **labour inspection system**, for example by training labour inspectors and involving different governmental and non-governmental actors in the preparation of a cross-sectoral mechanism of labour inspection that also covers child labour in the informal sector, agriculture and domestic work. Promote community-based monitoring systems and establish such systems at the lowest possible administrative level.

3.29 Participate actively in the development and adoption of a **new ILO convention** on the most intolerable (extreme) forms of child labour.

4. Action at international level

4.1 Increase overall **poverty orientation in aid programmes** in promoting economic growth while focusing on the most disadvantaged population groups, facilitating their access to productive employment, education, primary health care and basic social services.

4.2 Encourage the **ratification and implementation of relevant international instruments**, e.g. the Convention on the Rights of the Child and ILO Convention No.138 and other relevant conventions, and provide technical assistance to efforts aimed at fulfilling the requirements of these instruments.

4.3 **Provide assistance** to countries actively involved in the elimination of child labour, e.g. through bilateral and multilateral programmes, including the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), and examine the possibility of incorporating the obligation to combat child labour, as well as the obligation to ensure the rights of children, into their programme mandates wherever appropriate.

4.4 Consider examining **existing** bilateral and multilateral **development cooperation programmes** to assess their effects on child labour and, where appropriate, in cooperation with the developing countries concerned, adjusting the programmes, also taking into account this aspect, to ensure a better use of resources and a greater impact.

4.5 Collaborate in the drawing up and implementation of **national plans of action**, including capacity-building measures.

4.6 Contribute to establishing and implementing **quantitative and qualitative** gender disaggregated **indicators** for governments to use in monitoring their commitment to combat child labour, including changes in the situation of working children.

4.7 Support the development in developing countries of **national information collection, research capacity** and **monitoring systems** related to child labour, such as the ILO's Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour (SIMPOC), to provide these countries with a tool for determine the incidence and root causes of child labour and for planning action and measuring progress in programme intervention.

4.8 Encourage international organisations, bilateral assistance agencies and international financial institutions to support national research, policy development and monitoring, with regard to the rights of the child, including the elimination of child labour.

4.9 Support existing or contribute to the creation of new **regional systems for information** on and **analysis** of the content and progress of national plans, legislation and statistics.

4.10 Encourage promotion of a **cross-sectoral and integrated approach** to child labour in general, and to related **coordination, exchange of experience,** and **impact assessment**.

4.11 Encourage national and international debates among media professionals on the economic and social conditions of children, including child labour.

4.12 Support and participate in the work done by **multilateral organisations** and **international financial institutions** to eliminate child labour, especially the ILO, UNICEF, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the World Bank and the regional development banks, and promote better coordination between these organisations and institutions.

4.13 Encourage the development of voluntary codes of conduct on child labour and material and financial investment in programmes and projects to assist children and their families.

4.14 Support country-level coordination and monitoring, through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) or other relevant, effective and adaptable coordination frameworks.

4.15 Support the following up of actions aimed at the elimination of child labour by initiating informal consultations between governments, UN funds and programmes and specialised agencies, the World Bank and other financial institutions, the workers' and employers' organisations, the private sector and NGOs.